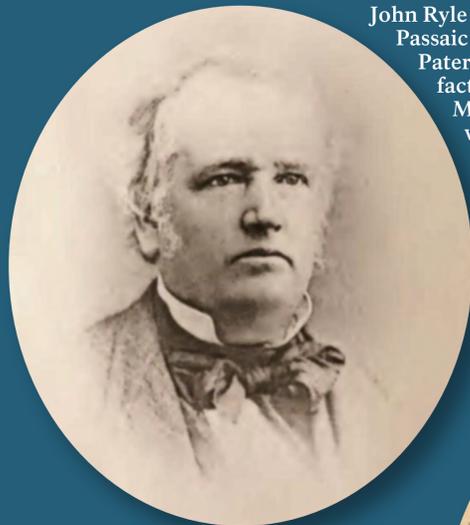




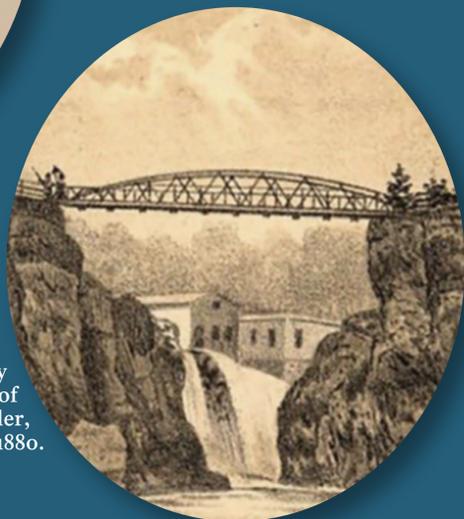
# Paterson's First Public Water Supply

In the autumn of 1856, the City of Paterson reached a milestone when water began flowing to the main part of town through the city's first public water supply. The achievement was due to John Ryle's Passaic Water Company, which had acquired rights to pump water from the Passaic River at the Great Falls. Over the next three decades, the company built pumping stations, blasted reservoirs out of bedrock and extended pipe networks. These improvements were absolutely crucial to the growth of Paterson into a world-class industrial city.

John Ryle (1817-1887) was President of the Passaic Water Company and founder of Paterson's silk industry. His silk factory was located at the Colt Gun Mill where the first pump house was constructed. Image Credit: Nelson and Shrinier, *History of Paterson and Its Environs*, 1920.



The Passaic Water Company's second pump house appears above the chasm beyond the footbridge over the Great Falls. The S.U.M. and the water company were in direct competition for the water of the falls. Image Credit: Packard and Butler, *Paterson, New Jersey*, 1880.



The Passaic Water Company did not keep up with the city's growth despite making large investments in infrastructure. Paterson's water supply ran dangerously low during a series of droughts in the 1880s. Eventually, the company consolidated operations with other water companies in neighboring communities, reducing competition and making water supply more predictable. In 1902, water began flowing from a new intake and the world's first large-scale sand filtration plant at Little Falls, about five miles upstream of the Great Falls. Today, the Passaic Valley Water Commission, a direct successor to the Passaic Water Company, continues to provide water to the cities of Paterson, Clifton, and Passaic.



The Passaic Water Company's first pump house of the 1850s was in a complex of mills below the Great Falls, later redeveloped as the Allied Textile Printers (ATP) Site. Water was pumped across the "broomstick" bridge, shown here in a photograph of about 1870. The bridge's pipe sent water to a reservoir in the area of Hinchliffe Stadium, directly behind you. Image Credit: Paterson Historic Preservation Commission.

## "To the Health and Comfort of the Citizens"

– Corporate Charter of the Passaic Water Company (1849)

### Disease

Paterson's population grew quickly during the mid-1800s amidst rising concern about the safety of water drawn from public wells. Cholera outbreaks in 1832 and 1849 killed hundreds of citizens. Typhoid and dysentery were also spread by foul water.

The Dublin Spring Water Boy, a sculpture created by Paterson's Gaetano Federici in 1931, marks the location of a former well at Mill and Oliver Streets. The statue commemorates the Irish, Italian, and other immigrant children who carried water in buckets and casks to houses and mills. The well was closed in the 1890s due to contamination. Image Credit: Hunter Research, Inc., 2022.



### Fire

Water buckets and manually operated pumps relying on wells were a feeble way to fight fires. Paterson and other cities constructed water systems with reservoirs and underground pipes to provide a steady flow of pressurized water to hundreds of fire hydrants.



Large mill fires such as the one that damaged the Machinists' Association mill in 1896 were an all-too-common event in Paterson. The mill was located at the corner of Broadway and Prospect. Image Credit: Glenn Corbett Collection.